# The Rule of the Sacred

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# The Rule of the Sacred:
# Religion, Nationalism and Secularity

## Working paper

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# Introduction

The title of the panel in which this paper is being presented is "Nationalism and its Others", and in this context religion appears a priori as one such "Other". In this paper, I would like to take the other side of the same coin – which is the question of the relation between nationalism and its others – and begin by considering what religion and nationalism have in common. In a recent article Rogers Brubaker discusses different approaches of the study of the relation between religion and nationalism. The first of these four approaches is precisely "the strategy of treating religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena" (Brubaker, 2012:3). How should we consider an analogy between two complex things which we already formally, terminologically, contextually, have predicated as different? One could say it is precisely because they are presented to us as different that we can consider the relation between them. What Brubaker suggests is connecting "both phenomenon to more general social structures and processes" and considering "religion and nationalism […] under more encompassing conceptual rubrics: as a mode of identification, a mode of social organization, and a way of framing political claims" (2012:4). With this in mind, I suggest defining religion and nationalism as sociohistorical imaginaries, and consider this basis as their formal relation. A sociohistorical imaginary is what institutes a given society and simultaneously provides the tools to interpret its reality (Castoriadis, 1997).

In this paper, I first discuss aspects of the linguistic forms which is the prism from which I approach the relation between religion and nationalism. By considering the terms themselves, we can interpret elements of the *inherited* code, which is the English language. Substituting

signification to the Aristotelian category of *substance*, I make use of the associated categories of *form* and *matter* to elaborate on the relation between religion and nationalism. Considered as necessarily correlated, these categories articulate a dynamics between language and significations, which appears as the common modus operandi of religion and nationalism. I further discuss how their significations are negotiated sociohistorically, instituting specific times and spaces, and corresponding temporal and spiritual institutions. The paper concludes on the historical role of secularity in the imaginary distinction between religion and nationalism.

## Elementary forms

Brubakers conceptual rubrics relate to the way Cornelius Castoriadis characterises the social imaginary, for "the imaginary of the society or of the period considered" is:

> "This element - which gives a specific orientation to every institutional system, which overdetermines the choice and the connections of symbolic networks, which is the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence, its world, and its relations with this world, this originary structuring component, this central signifying signified, the source of that which presents itself in every instance as an indisputable and undisputed meaning, the basis for articulating what does matter and what does not, the origin of the surplus of being of the objects of practical, affective and intellectual investment, whether individual or collective […]." (Castoriadis, 1997:243)

The social imaginary is a dynamics of grids of significations, hierarchies in the etymological sense, ordering and selecting what is pertinent (Castoriadis, 1986:465); what Brubaker terms "ontologies and structures of justification" (2012:17). Such significations can be seen as universal in the sense that we, as complex cultural animals, necessarily produce and reproduce such significations to make sense of and in reality. In *De Anima*, Aristotle examines the nature of the soul and elaborates his ontology of substance.[1] Substance and soul can be equated as they both represent the cause and origin of existence (*De Anima* II.4, Hicks 1907:49), the reality of reality so to say. By analogy, paradigmatic imaginary significations can be considered the substance or the soul of a given culture.

Aristotle presents three senses of substance: form, matter and the form-matter compound (*De Anima II.1*, Hicks 1907:65). The aim of the present explanation of these categories is to provide working definitions before elaborating on the relation between these categories. Extracted from the complexity of Aristotle's ontology, they appear here as necessarily simplified. The distinction form-matter is one of the main categorical distinctions established

[1] The category of substance has many dimensions for Aristotle and is central to his ontology. The simplest working definition is to define substance as reality which could translate of the initial Greek term *ousia* (Cohen, 2009:37).

by Aristotle (Bernardt, 1979:109). The term "form" translates two different terms: *morphè* and *eidos*. The former designates the aspect of things, their superficial forms, whereas the latter, which is the one referred to in the form-matter distinction, refers to formal reality, understood as the rational structure of reality (Pellegrin 2009:48). The term "matter" translates *hylè* ("wood"), but as a concept, it is yet not reducible to the physical, material aspect of things. More generally, matter designates what is subjected to change, what can potentially take form and lose its form (Cohen, 2009b). The complex relation Aristotle elaborates between these categories is best summed up by the following exegesis:

> "Form may be accidental to the matter that it informs, but it is essential to the compound substance (i.e., the compound of matter and form) that it is the form of. Form is what makes the individual plants and animals what they are. Therefore, it is the substance of those individuals." (Cohen, 2002)

What this suggests is that the relation between substance (signification), form and matter operates as a kind of cycle. The logical nexus this relation creates shows us that the form of a substance is necessarily correlated to the latter, while matter may first appear of a secondary importance. Nevertheless, as social imaginaries can be primarily defined as instituting a (cultural, symbolical) time and a space, the framework here derives fundamentally from Aristotle's perspective whereby substance is postulated as a universal. By instituting a space-time, the sociohistorical imaginary institutes form and matter that is relative to its frame. While a signification may well be conceived as universal, form and therefore matter are predicated from a given perspective.[2] However complex, they are limited and limiting. As a relative process, formulation necessarily mirrors materialisation, or there would be no realisation. And while form determines or predicates matter, it is the conjunction/disjunction of the two which is significant.

In the imaginary space-time, codetermination appears as defining the relation between form and matter appears codetermination of form and matter. The reason why Aristotle states form as the cause, the origin of the cycle, is because the formal dimension is the first conscious, rational, logical dimension of the social imaginary we apprehend. As form determines matter, matter is the second dimension, the dimension where experience is formed. And it is only through this dynamic codetermination, a speech-act so to say, that a sociohistorical sense can emerge and significations be instituted. The two different perspectives are nevertheless articulated together. The manner in which this is operated is through the formation of a code, a language, conceived in time as the repetition of the formulation of experience and the

[2] The question of perspective is fundamental in Albert Einstein's theory of relativity which considers precisely space-time as a continuum.

signification of forms.[3] These different codes are our only means of communication within a cultural or imaginary space-time, as there is no social world outside language (in reference to Paul Ricœur, Langdridge, 2006:646). In short, we reach an understanding of the reality of this process by imagining a chronology, a hierarchy of forms. And again, looking from the perspective of the signification, rather than the form which institutes a cultural origin, Castoriadis defines the concept of signification as "an indefinite skein of interminable referrals to something other than (than what would appear to be stated directly)" (1997:253). These referrals are the forms used in the different languages (linguistic, but also artistic, physical, sensual, etc.) and the experiences tied to them. Castoriadis then points to the central role of language:

> "These other things can be both significations and non-significations – that to which significations relate or refer. The lexicon of the significations of a language does not revolve around itself, is not closed in upon itself, as has flatly been stated. What is closed in upon itself, fictively, is the code, the lexicon of ensemblist-identitary signifieds, each of which can take on one or more sufficient definitions. But the lexicon of significations is always open; for the full signification of a word is everything that can be socially stated, thought, represented or done on the basis of this word." (1997:253)

The phrase "the full signification of a word" reduces language down to linguistic language. The reason Castoriadis exemplifies the relation between signification and language in this way is because linguistic language is considered language par excellence. On the other hand this reduction opens up a complexity, which already appears formally in the definition that follows the reductive statement: "everything that can be socially stated, thought, represented or done." The situation may still appear as paradoxical: in general, words (or signs) allow us to give form, to formulate, to predicate our reality; and in particular, they inform, encrypt, make this reality more complex. This disjunction is only resolved on a higher level, through a process also involving the dimension of conjunction.

One might wonder here how a categorisation Aristotle applies to plants or animals, also applies to the much more abstract significations we are concerned with, those of religion and nationalism. But even if a form is considered necessary in its relation to a signification, the actual form of a signification is accidental: on the higher level we mention above, matter is form and vice versa. The interrogation is therefore epistemological and should thus be rephrased as follows: how does the process of signification which applies to forms which matter in the natural world, applies to those which matter in the cultural world?

[3] The repetition of these processes is accompanied by other processes: the memorisation and transmission of the forms.

## Forms of matter

By considering religion and nationalism as sociohistorical imaginaries, religion and nationalism are conceived as forms relative to the paradigmatic significations that they are the forms of. This infers in return that the signification to which these forms are relative to are restricted by the sociohistorical matter framed in the imaginary space-time continuum. So the first reason this categorisation applies is because religion and nationalism are tied to social experiences, or rather they are social experiences. I have started by defining religion and nationalism as social imaginaries suggesting the potential analogy between the two concepts. If we look up their respective definitions in the Oxford Dictionary, the definitions we find are fairly abstract. The first entries of the definitions of religion and nationalism read, respectively: "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods" and "patriotic feeling, principles, or efforts" (*Oxford Dictionaries Online*, *ODO*, 2010). The primary sense in which they are abstract is because neither definitions provide a (particular) when nor where. At first sight, they are each conceived as equal to themselves, as identical, in time and space.[4] And yet, both words are themselves, as linguistic formations, set in a given frame. In the case of religion, for instance, the last entry on the "origin" of the word in the Oxford Dictionary reads: "Middle English (originally in the sense 'life under monastic vows'): from Old French, or from Latin religio(n-) 'obligation, bond, reverence', perhaps based on Latin religare 'to bind'". The first information places the term in its original time frame of Middle English: a period between the 11th and 15th centuries (which corresponds to the High and Late Middle Ages), in a corner of the world loosely referred to as England. Although in brackets, the second information is perhaps just as much important. The original meaning, "life under monastic vows", greatly restricts the signification of the term religion compared to the contemporary sense provided by the first entry of the definition. The evolution of the same form, meaning a precise hierarchical and normative relation with the institution of the Church, to the contemporary meaning encompassing all cultural relations to a God figure comes under the poetic or metaphoric aspect of language (Ricœur, 2003). In this particular case, this translation can be described as a transhistorical synecdoche.

The image of the initial signification of religion refers to the regular clergy, those members of the Church of Rome who follow, literally, the *rules* of a religious order. Traditionally, the regular clergy is contrasted with the secular clergy, which means those members of the

[4] We could elaborate further on the similarities between the two definitions. E.g. each of them describes experiences which in relation to a particular external figure: God or *patrie* (literally, fatherland), etc.

Church who live "in the world" (*ODO*, 2010). In the Middle Ages, the world of the secular clergy of the Church of Rome is medieval Europe. Described as feudal,[5] the societies of medieval Europe themselves are described as organised according to a set of cultural rules, and are therefore societies of order.[6] In addition, the contemporary sense of the term secular, from which the concept of secularity referred to in this paper derives, appears as also resulting from a transhistorical synecdoche of a similar nature as the term religion, where a part is used to describe the whole.[7]

A synecdoche is a common figure of speech, a particular type of metaphor, were a part is substituted for the whole or the whole for a part. Contrary to other common figures of speech, such as comparisons, metaphors do not present a semiotic sign which signifies the process of analogy or substitution.[8] But most importantly, although certain metaphors have become worn out, in the *The Rule of Metaphor*, Paul Ricœur shows how meaning is produced and reproduced across levels and categories of discourse through the living power of the metaphor as "the conjunction of fiction and redescription" (Ricœur, 2003:291). The process of the "metaphoricity of metaphors" thus corresponds to the creation of social significations. The fictional aspect of metaphors relates to the way human beings experience reality: as this reality is elusive, fictional elements are necessary to organise it in the *form* of narratives. Redescription refines the notion of identity: a metaphor is not simply the copy of what it refers to; it is a transfer of the same to the other (in time, in form, etc.).

History is always taken in medias res, which means that in matter, continuity and discontinuity are always interrelated. Once sociohistorical matter is predicated by a form (through redefinition, reformulation, translation, etc.) it has the potential to become real, to be imagined as real, and concurrently, because it becomes transmittable, it becomes social. The languages we use have been transformed semantically, grammatically and graphically.

[5] For specialists, Feudalism is a debated concept. While indeed the Middle Ages present us with feudal societies, feudalism, as a social organising principle, is not a particularity of the Middle Ages.

[6] I am using this expression in a literal sense, and not in reference to the debate between society of order and society of class. A society of class is in fact, in our context, a society of order. The continuities as well as the discontinuities between pre-industrial societies described as societies of order and industrial societies of class oversimplify the complexities and the qualities of social significations in the transition between these two models.

[7] A determining period for the transformation of terms was certainly, as Eric Hobsbawm points out for the terms used to describe society, the "age of the dual revolution" (Hobsbawm, 1996). Such is the case for order and class mentioned in the previous note.

[8] The synecdoche is related to another type of metaphor, the metonymy which operates a transfer either from a whole entity to one of its attributes (as in metonymy; 'the blue' standing for 'the sky') or vice versa. Synecdoches are frequent in political and media discourses: names of states are regularly substituted for the names of governments, political representatives or sports teams. Conversely, the names of capital cities often replace the names of government representatives, or, if this particular illustration is considered a metonymy, it transfers the meaning of a political or economic institution situated in the city to the name of the city itself.

Writing itself fixates forms for posterity; it is therefore not fortuitous that the invention of the printing machine also participated in the homogenisation of languages and their formation into national languages (Anderson, 1983). Ricœur argues that language is in fact part of the process of experiencing human reality because of what he terms the expressibility of experience: "To bring [experience] into language is not to change it into something else, but, in articulating and developing it, to make it become itself" (1981:115). On a phenomenological level, matter also determines form: its indeterminacy renders its reformulation necessary for its human, social reality. In time and space, this means that formulations do not necessarily correspond to the socio-historical matter they describe. Indeed, our experience of things always appears to us as a tension between similarity and difference. Our modern perception of experience realigns and fixates form and matter in time; perhaps for reasons of clarity, but also partly because we have cultural tendency to perceive things in a linear fashion, and because it essentially is an ideological perspective on things.[9] In this particular instance it is a perspective on history, a view of history, which processes historical material into linear, positivist narratives. And such linearity is one of the characteristics of national historiography, thought and developed from the perspective of positivism (Geary, 2002). But nationalist historiography would not come into being before the nineteenth century, in the secular universities of Europe (and by extension, in the rest of the world), and genealogical linearity is not exclusive to nationalist narratives. Of course, most narratives are indeed linear, the traditional form is chronological as the various narratives found in the Bible illustrate. Both cases, of national historiography and in the biblical narratives, are representative of significations of authority, providing myths that found the spaces and the times to be reproduced in their sociohistorical realization.[10]

The two imaginaries of religion and nationalism are thus analogous as far as they determine matter in a linear way. And yet, they appear as different on many other levels. Formally of course, but more fundamentally on the level of the actual spaces and times were and when they operate these determinations. In European history, the frames they institute are different: most national histories set the origins of their nation in the early medieval ages – the dimension of the time of nations is a much shorter time span that is instituted by the book of Genesis; furthermore, the space of nations is a usually clearly defined and fixed territory, the

[9] It could be one of the imaginary responses to the chaos of every-day life, where experience takes place without our possibility to mediate it through a formulation. Immediate experience is the experience of chaos. It could be interesting to discuss this in the light of the acceleration of time.

[10] The now global seven days week further illustrates how such frames can be extracted from their original justification.

homeland. A priori, this space-time does not challenge the space-time of biblical creation. In other words, the incipit of nationalist significations (the origins) is not as paradigmatic as that of religious significations (the creation). An illustration on how this is significant is that there are no national ideologies which promote a different calendar for instance, a different organization of the week in seven days, etc. Indeed, after being reproduced by national cultures, this has now logically become part of a contemporary global culture. Challenging our calendar may seem absurd, partly because it is reproduced across the globe as the international calendar, and more significantly because we believe that its basic form corresponds to the most natural. And yet, even within Christianity, the topic has been much debated, and different branches still do not have identical calendars. And a calendar, is a form which predicates natural cycles, it is not a natural signification. More precisely, it is a cultural paradigmatic signification, of the measuring and remembering of human time, that has been negotiated throughout history and across cultural spaces.[11]

## Sociohistorical significations

The contemporary secularized form of the Gregorian calendar predicates our global contemporary time scale, but it also signifies the transformation, or translation of its historical forms. The different forms are negotiated against other forms, which are sometimes forgotten and generally considered obsolete, or primitive. Nevertheless they are part of what their relations, their relative negotiations result in: a form of forms, a transhistorical signification. Nationalism can be considered to be secular in the sense that it does not challenge a certain number of "regular" paradigmatic significations of religion, as illustrated in the present case with Christianity. Nationalism negotiates relative spaces between such significations to exert its own cultural hegemony. Moreover, as suggested in the above illustration, cultural forms correspond to sociohistorical experiences. The illustration also presents how forms are signified through other forms in relative dimensions. Geopolitical institutions are such discursive forms. Indeed, they signify a certain spatial imaginary. For example, national institutions and national territories (and histories and languages) are ideally tied together. Similarly, religious institutions are also ideally tied to the elements of the world they formulate. The ideal being what the institutions tend to, what they promote, what their positions are, and not simply the representation of an a-temporal universal. The ideal thus defines the interests of the corresponding institution and justifies the experience.

[11] In relation to the acceleration of time, we could add that the rationalisation of time, in hours, seconds and more, has reduced the sequences at which we experience time. This could partly explain how the acceleration of time is being experienced.

While negotiations surrounding our calendar time scale appear to be relatively stale lately, negotiations surrounding our political institutions within this time scale occupy a generally more turbulent space. While nationalism writes linear and coherent national stories, the story of nationalism follows a formally more chaotic history. The period of transition between medieval institutions and modern institutions has been determining for the formation of nationalism (Brubakers, 2012:6). In other words, different stages in the negotiations for cultural power between state institutions and the institutions of the Church of Rome have in time and in space made nationalism, the ideal of nationalism, possible. It is not fortuitous that this transition relates to linguistic transitions as well. Middle English is an expression that does not capture the depth of the its history. From a subaltern group of languages and dialects, one particular version of Middle English was renegotiated as a political and legal (albeit chiefly oral) language in the transition between the High and Late Middle Ages (Crystal, 2004). The high point of this transition on the part of political institution is the Pleading in English Act (or Statute of Pleading) of 1362 under the reign of Edward III. It is certainly significant that this occurred during the reign of Edward III who was the king who initiated the Hundred Years War for the crown of the kingdom of France. The decline of Anglo-Norman, or Norman French, is thus concurrent to the political recognition of an English language during a major political and military struggle between two feudal states.[12] And yet, this foundational stage in the becoming of the English language into a national language is not the result of a nationalist ideology: as the original text of the Act (written in the Legal French of the period) reads, it is rather in terms of usage, or customs, that the act is justified.[13] At the same time, we have to recognise how such developments have participated in informing (although perhaps a priori in an arbitrary way) modern significations of people, of popular sovereignty, and of course of standardised languages, all participating at their level to the gestation of national imaginaries.

At a later stage, another high point in the "magmatic" evolution of the English language has certainly been the Reformation which presents us with more substantial elements of the Church and state, but also with elements of more fundamental "cosmological", changes (Szporluk 1988:86): it presents us with the conjunction of challenges against the doctrines but also against the hierarchies of power associated with it. [14] The reformation in the Kingdom of England was a process which originated under the rule of king Henry VIII, who was instituted

[12] The Hundred Years War also corresponds to the actual end of the crusades which had signified the consolidation of the Christian commonwealth.

[13] A reproduction of the statute alongside a modern English translation can be accessed on the following webpage: http://www.languageandlaw.org/texts/stats/pleading.htm.

supreme head of the newly formed Church of England, effectively – but not entirely dogmatically – separating it from the Holy Roman Catholic Church by a series of Parliamentary acts in the 1530s (Pendrill, 2000:88-94; see also Jones, 2002). The Protestant reformation which was gaining momentum in mainland Europe exerted great influence on the process of the English reformation, but it was not until Elizabeth I's accession to the throne that protestant dogmas became dominant.

The theological principle of the sola scriptura ("by scripture alone") was the ultimate principle in protestant theology vindicated in the Reformation. It is a formal principle which establishes the Bible as the only source of legitimate authority (McGarth, 2007:59).[15] One of the main consequences is the depreciation of the other sources of power: the clergy and tradition. Their successful discursive deprecation has resulted, in time, in the relativisation of their signification. Another consequence is the promotion of a less restricted access to the Bible, which entailed the development of popular, vernacular versions of the Bible.[16]

The cosmos which was promoted through the Reformation was radically different from the then traditional order which established the Holy See as a central authority in medieval Europe.[17] In consequence, papal power and its signification(s) diminished in pace with the spread of the Reformation across Europe. The new order was finally settled in 1648 with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia treaties, which put an end to the religious violence and wars which had torn Europe during the many preceding decades. The most relevant element in regards to the Peace of Westphalia is that it established the recognition of state sovereignty, signifying a new form of sovereignty. The recognition of the absolute sovereignty of states, de facto and de jure, effectively disintegrated the significance of the papal power of recognition of kingship in favour of power of the kings and princes of Europe (Straumann, 2008; Suter, 2006).

[14] There were other radical innuendos of imaginary change in the catholic space, notably in the cosmopolitanism and humanism of theologians and scholars such as Michel de Montaigne, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus and Thomas More, which were the first "beams" of the Enlightenment period and constitute the beginning of what is called the "Republic of Letters".

[15] The second general category in Christian theology being tradition, or "material principles".

[16] At first, Henry VIII was opposed to the introduction of an English translation of the Bible. Eventually, the Tyndale Bible translation, even if incomplete, would be the first to benefit from printing and will be considered

[17] In continuity of the already authoritative symbol of the city of Rome. The conversion of Frankish king Clovis in the fifth century A.D. effectively established the medieval power association between Rome and European states carried out through the clergy which answered both to their respective monarchs and to the Pope. This association was further expressed in the papal recognitions of kingship which can be assimilated to the symbolic act of incarnation, establishing the "divine right" of the kings. The first such explicit recognition took place on behalf of Frankish king Pippin in 757. At the same time, the king also decreed the first legal settlement of the question of the temporal power of the Papacy (see Sæbø, 2000).

What these readjustments and mutations signify is the modification of the social order: the secular clergy was loosing its prime position. Without being entirely relativised, the Early Modern period in Europe is marked by the mutlidimensional negotiations which the demoting of the political cum cultural power of the Church of Rome represents. This was of course no sudden change. This power had already been severely hampered in the century which separated the early stages of the Reformation and the Peace of Westphalia. The well established divine right of kings was one of the elements which would justify the instituting of King Henry VIII as supreme head of the Church of England. This signified that the king was recognised as being invested with kingly power directly by the form which represented the ultimate and primary signification: the figure of God.[18] By the time the Peace of Westphalia was being negotiated, this signification had informed all the European heads of state (Blin, 2006:56).[19]

# Conclusion

I have briefly examined fragments of the political and ideological contestation of the medieval order, primarily the relation between the Church of Rome and the Kingdom of England to illustrate the multidimensional relations between religion, nationalism and by extension secularity. It is in the transitions between significations that spaces of negotiations are formulated. Although nationalism, as a doctrine, will not be formulated before late modernity, it is during this transition from feudal to modern society that many of the significations which would recompose into nationalism have been instituted.

This brief examination has been set in a framework based on categories of form and matter. A form is an authority when it establishes a hierarchy of the forms that inform it. The way it establishes such a hierarchy is determined by sociohistorical matter, that is, in time and space. An authoritative form is thus a performative cultural discourse, in a similar way certain utterances are speech-acts (Austin, 1962). But this is not inherent to the form, if there is no sociohistorical matter from which we can abstract reproducing forms; if there is no experience, there is no performance. A form can be described as authoritative only a posteriori, that is after the phenomenological experience which will justify its position, regardless whether the form was already formulated or inherited (reproduction and distortion

[18] This was also supported by the notions of kinship and blood which had been of particular significance to the nobles of Europe since long before.

[19] Looking Western Schism and its origins, we get a deeper and longer sense of the negotiations of political or institutional power between Kings and Popes, and indeed between Popes as well. In the historical novel by Maurice Druon, *The Accursed Kings*, the thought of a cardinal expresses the double face (temporal and spiritual) position of the head of the Church of Rome: “Being a priest is not enough to become Pope; one also has to know how to be a prince.” (personal translation, Druon, 1977:19).

of an instituted signification) or whether it is a new form. We cannot access the experience of others, and reality in general, without languages, linguistic or otherwise. Furthermore, all languages are elaborated on the basis of imaginary forms through an elaborate and repetitive process of symbolling (the act of adding meaning). In order to create such an access, formulation becomes a necessity; in order to maintain this access (and to refrain from opening other accesses), reformulation becomes a necessity: as is suggested in the ODO definition, the word religion was redefined through reformulation, that is, with other forms used to add and eventually change the meaning of the term, refining the form and its meaning into the fixed and abstract signification we use today.

This theoretical elaboration thus appears to be a sort of détournement (Debord, 1970: §204-209), a hijacking of Aristotelean ontological categories for the purposes of an epistemological reflection for the study of the relation between religion and nationalism as social imaginaries. The aim was less a demonstration and rather the formulation of epistemological interrogations for the study of religion and nationalism, and by extension secularity. Indeed, this reflection leads to many interrogations for further inquiry into the signification of nationalism, which does not appear as fundamental as religion and its instituting of a world, but rather as the endeavour, the justification for modern institutions and social groups to define a certain place within this world. The dimensions signified in religious and national narratives and histories, albeit performed from different space-time perspectives, raises the question of the extent to which nationalist histories, at least in the European context, is a reformulation of the historiographical narratives of the Old Testament and, on a mythical level, represent versions or adaptations of how other peoples than the initial chosen people can themselves have a shared sense of uniqueness.[20]

What of the concept and signification of secularity? As it derives from religious discourse, the signification of the term appears as more ambivalent as simply that which is not religious. In consequence, and bearing in mind the implicit idea that religion and nationalism follow an analoguous modus operandi, the interrogation of their relation is indeed the interrogation of the signification of secularity. The question could be formulated as follows: do secular rules follow a substantially different process of signification than "regular" rules? This further leads

[20] There are numerous elements across different nationalisms which illustrate this: the expression "manifest destiny" in American nationalism is perhaps one of the most obvious illustration. On another note, the age-old and widespread antisemistism also suggests how a cultural, cosmological complex of inferiority has been central in European cultures (although not exclusively), leading in the age of nationalism to the most extreme form of exclusion. The Nazi regime is the obvious high point of this evolution, but it would be simplistic to ascribe such motives to the national-socialism and other emergences of fascism alone.

to questioning how radical and revolutionary modernity actually is if we take into account the long historical moment within which modernity, with nationalism, occurs. The extent to which nationalism profoundly opposes traditional religious frameworks is debatable, contrary for instance to elements of the development of the scientific method. To conclude on a contemporary note, what is the signification in contemporary political discourse, where "revolutions" – a scientific term – are deprecated in favour of more consensual "reforms" – a religious term?

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